



# OFFICE OF PRIMARY CARE AND RURAL HEALTH

PO Box 142005 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-2005 Phone: (801) 273-6677 Fax: (801) 277-6512

Email: <u>opcrh@utah.gov</u> <u>ruralhealth.health.utah.gov</u>

## UTAH OFFICE OF PRIMARY CARE AND RURAL HEALTH

#### **SUMMARY**

The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Office of Primary Care and Rural Health (OPCRH) is pleased to report our progress toward accomplishing our mission, "collaborating with statewide partners to improve access to quality health care in rural and underserved communities." Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, OPCRH responded and made programmatic changes to improve the efficiency and quality of the programs we administer in support of our partners. Below are a few of our accomplishments over the past year:

- Launched the Behavioral Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program for health professionals who work in publicly funded sites through a \$2.0 million appropriation from the Utah State Legislature;
- Received a \$4 million award from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for "Addressing Health Equity in a Post-COVID Landscape;"
- Channeled \$1.7M in SHIP COVID (CARES Act) funds to eligible rural hospitals;
- Convened the Utah Health Workforce Coalition to develop a coordinated approach to address health workforce issues statewide;
- Launched our support for RHCs through the Practice Operations National Database (POND);
- Awarded a grant to sponsor UDOH's first AmeriCorps VISTA national service program;
- Represented rural Utah on the COVID-19 Disparities Work Group and worked with partners to ensure resources, testing, and vaccines were directed to the most remote and isolated communities; and
- Celebrated the "Power of Rural" with partners on National Rural Health Day.

As the state of Utah's primary health resource for rural and underserved communities, please let us know how we might partner with you to support your organization's or community's objectives.

## UTAH OFFICE OF PRIMARY CARE AND RURAL HEALTH

### FEDERAL PROGRAMS State Office of Rural Health (SORH)

As Utah's State Office of Rural Health, OCPRH serves as a resource for Utah's rural and underserved communities by:

- Collection and dissemination of Information;
- · Coordination for rural health care activities; and
- Provide technical assistance to partners.

The SORH's monthly newsletter, "Rural Health Connect," has more than 750 subscribers. To commemorate National Rural Health Day and Utah Rural Health Week, OPCRH organized a photo contest that depicts the "Power of Rural," and recognized Jennifer Sadoff, CEO of Moab Regional Hospital, as the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health's Community Star, for the difference she's made in her community through collaboration, education, innovation, and communication.

In August 2020, OPCRH launched the Utah Health Workforce Coalition to develop a coordinated approach to address health workforce issues statewide, with an emphasis on rural and underserved Utah. With support from Veritas Health Solutions, the Coalition developed the following consensus priorities to guide strategic planning: 1) Utah needs high-quality health workforce data; 2) Utah needs a well-respected body that generates consensus recommendations for health workforce policy and programming. The recommendations are expected to inform potential legislation for the 2022 General Session.

To support Utah's Rural Health Clinics, OPCRH contracted with Lilypad to provide individualized data, technical assistance, education and training to identify performance gaps, and assist with RHC performance improvement. The SORH grant also provided funding to the Rural Health Association of Utah to support its work as Utah's organization member of 3RNet, a national recruitment and retention platform for physicians and other health professionals.

The OPCRH was also awarded another five (5) years of funding for the SORH program through the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy.

#### **Primary Care Office (PCO)**

A national update of both geographic and facility-based HPSA designations will occur in SFY22. The above-mentioned Utah Health Workforce Coalition convened key stakeholders statewide to generate recommendations to address Utah's persistent workforce shortages.

In 2020–2021, the PCO program processed five (5) J-1 Visa Waiver applications; up from three (3) the previous year. Due to Utah's low utilization of this important recruiting tool, OPCRH initiated a process to update the program's administrative rule, which will make it easier to hire the best quality physicians. The changes became effective in SFY22. Additionally, the OPCRH updated the statewide Primary Care Needs Assessment, which includes a new analysis regarding telehealth utilization in 2019 and 2020. The report is expected to be published early in SFY22.

#### Health Equity (CDC)

In May 2021, OPCRH received \$3.0 million as part of a larger award by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to the Utah Department of Health for "Addressing COVID-19 Disparities and Advancing Health Equity in the State of Utah." In collaboration with the Utah Department of Health's Office of Health Disparities, OPCRH will prepare an RFP for community-based organizations to address health equity issues in rural areas. The office also plans to hire a Health Equity Specialist in the near future.

The objectives of the CDC funding are to;

- build capacity within the community to address and mitigate health inequities highlighted by or exacerbated by COVID-19;
- promote health equity; and
- link communities and individuals to social resources to meet their needs.

#### Rural Veterans Health Access Program (RVHAP)

In 2019, the OPCRH was awarded a three year \$900,000 grant to increase care coordination and access to quality healthcare for veterans who live in rural communities in Utah. During the three (3) year project period, the OPCRH developed and completed multiple action items, such as: convening the Utah Rural Veterans Coalition to bring together key partners in Utah to perform a statewide needs assessment and guide program activities which has now merged with the SAMHSA Utah Governor's Challenge, where it continues presently. Second, the OPCRH established the Rural Veteran Sub-grant Program. This one-year grant program enabled rural organizations and providers the opportunity to improve coordination of care between the Veteran Health Administration (VA) and critical access hospitals (CAH), rural hospitals, rural clinics, and rural health organizations to increase access to care, reduce barriers, and provide additional resources for veterans who live in rural Utah. During the RVHAP project period, the OPCRH awarded six (6) organizations, with two (2) reapplying. Third, the OPCRH has coordinated with the VA Telemental Health HUB to increase access to telehealth for veterans in rural Utah. Currently, the OPCRH and VA are piloting two (2) rural locations in a CAH and rural hospital to host the veteran telehealth platform.



Photo credit: Candice Barney

#### Small Rural Hospital Improvement Program (SHIP)

In 2020–2021, 16 of Utah's 21 rural hospitals participated in activities related to quality improvement and transition to value. This program provided \$10,795 to eligible rural hospitals (49 beds or fewer) to assist with improvements in value and quality, including such areas as patient satisfaction, lean performance, and compliance. Additionally, through CARES Act funding, the OPCRH directed funds to all rural hospitals to support COVID safety and response activities, such as increasing capacity for patient triage, testing, and laboratory services and maintaining hospital operations, such as paid leave for exposed or vulnerable staff.

#### Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Grant (Flex)

In 2020–2021, OPCRH funded four (4) Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) for financial and operational improvement projects and two (2) CAHs to participate in the Antibiotic Stewardship educational series. Additionally, the OPCRH secured agreements with Comagine Health to provide one-on-one support with quality improvement and REDiHealth Analytics to conduct population health needs assessments. Finally, we worked with the Bureau of EMS and Preparedness to perform Rural EMS Agency Needs Assessments and develop action performance improvement plans for twenty-eight (28) agencies.

We also held our 10th annual Rural Hospital Administrator's Summit in Bryce Canyon City with 35 attendees from across the state. The administrators below were recognized with awards in the following categories:

- Leadership: Si Hutt, Heber Valley Hospital
- Community Benefit during COVID-19 Pandemic: Jeremy Lyman, Blue Mountain Hospital
- Innovation: Philip Eaton, Mountain West Medical Center

#### State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP)

The SLRP requires states to provide 1:1 matching funds. The Utah State Legislature did not appropriate funds for the Health Care Workforce Financial Assistance Program in FY21, but appropriated \$2.0 million to launch a new loan repayment program for behavioral healthcare professionals who practice in public facilities in underserved areas in exchange for a three-year service commitment to the state of Utah. SLRP funds were used to match \$70,500 in BHWLRP awards, thereby extending the value of the state funds.

#### AmeriCorps VISTA

In April 2021, OPCRH received the Utah Department of Health's first AmeriCorps VISTA award to participate in this prestigious national service program. The Utah Primary Care and Rural Health VISTA Program will elevate the capacity of rural and underserved communities to deliver quality health care by supporting programs that recruit behavioral health specialists, improve access to care for rural veterans, and mitigate health workforce shortages. Two AmeriCorps VISTA members accepted offers to join OPCRH and will begin their year of service in August 2021.



#### STATE PROGRAMS

#### **Primary Care Grants Program**

The Primary Care Grants Program is a competitive annual program that awards grants to organizations that provide access to primary care services to low income individuals and families without health insurance. In 2020–2021, the SPCGP awarded 42 organizations with contracts totaling \$2,282,903, which served approximately 45,000 patients across 15 counties in the state.

### Assistance for People with Bleeding Disorders

The Bleeding Disorders Program provides funding to the Utah Hemophilia Foundation's Lifeline Program to help individuals obtain hemophilia treatment and provide a financial safety net for treatment costs. In 2020–2021, the Bleeding Disorders program supported 25 individuals for a total of \$93,606.

#### Dental Lifeline Network (DLN)

Dental Lifeline Network•Utah helps individuals with disabilities or who are elderly, medically fragile, or underinsured and cannot afford or otherwise access treatment for severe dental conditions. Established in 2015 with the support of the Utah Dental Association, the program served 98 patients and facilitated \$329,707 in donated treatment. Of the 98 patients served, 60 percent are seniors older than age 60. DLN's statewide volunteer network includes 125 dentists and 53 labs. The program provided \$7.29 worth of donated care for every \$1 spent supporting volunteers.

### Rural Physician Loan Repayment Program (RPLRP)

OPCRH receives an ongoing annual appropriation of \$300,000 to provide education loan repayment assistance to physicians in exchange for a two-year service commitment at a rural hospital. The employing hospitals are required to match the loan repayment amount 1:1. In FY21, the RPLRP awarded eight (8) new contracts (\$30,000 each) and two (2) one year extensions (\$15,000 each). Providers were located in the following counties: Kane, Box Elder, Juab, Sevier, Summit, Sanpete, San Juan, Uintah, and Sevier.

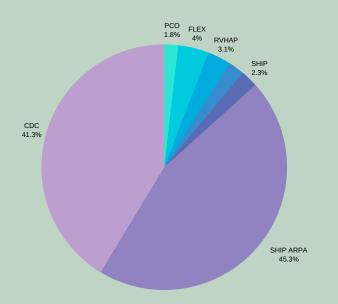
### Behavioral Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program (BHWLRP)

In FY21, the Utah State Legislature made a one-time \$2.0 million appropriation to develop and implement a loan repayment program for behavioral health professionals who work in a publicly-funded setting in exchange for a three-year service commitment to the state of Utah. Participating sites are required to match 10% of the award amount. During the program's first year, OPCRH provided 48 awards worth \$946,504 for providers who work at 19 sites.

### Healthcare Workforce Financial Assistance Program (HCWFAP)

The HCWFAP provides student loan repayment assistance to eligible health care providers in exchange for working at least two years in an approved, underserved area in Utah. The Utah State Legislature did not appropriate funds for this program in FY21, so no new awards were made. As a result, the program was unable to access the federally funded State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP), which requires a 1:1 match with state funds.





### **Federal Programs**

\$4,386,661
\$4,000,000
\$391,386
\$300,000
\$223,410
\$218,212
\$202,500
\$176,682

### **State Programs**

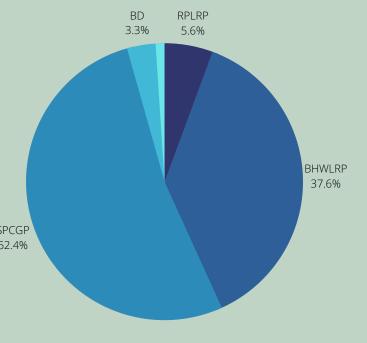
 SPCGP
 \$2,791,000

 BHWLRP
 \$2,000,000

 RPLRP
 \$300,000

 BD
 \$177,600

 DLN
 \$55,000





**3rd Place: Kayla Olson** 

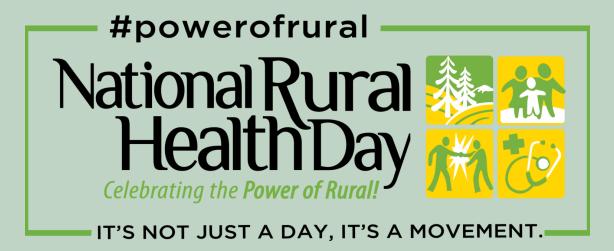
# National Rural Health Day Photo Contest Winners



2nd Place: Matt McCullough



1st Place: Jolyn Smith



#### **Meet the OPCRH Team**



(L-R) Front row: Vicki Allison, Liz Craker, Jazmin Letamendi, Kelsey Toups, Robbin Williams Back row: Holli Mills, Colton Gordon, Mason Payne, Prudvi Marneedi, Ashley Moretz

Mission: To collaborate with statewide partners to improve access to quality health care in rural and underserved communities.

Vision: To elevate the capacity of rural and underserved communities to deliver quality health care.

